



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
TUESDAY, MAY 31, 2005
WWW.USDOJ.GOV

CRM
(202) 514-2008
TDD (202) 514-1888

FINAL GUILTY PLEA IN OPERATION DIGITAL GRIDLOCK, FIRST FEDERAL PEER-TO-PEER COPYRIGHT PIRACY CRACKDOWN

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The fourth and final defendant in Operation Digital Gridlock pleaded guilty today to one count of conspiracy to commit felony criminal copyright infringement, the Justice Department announced today. Bryan F. Tanner, also known as “Axeman,” 42, of Fulton, New York, entered his plea in front of Judge Paul L. Friedman in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

Tanner’s conviction is the final conviction resulting from Operation Digital Gridlock, a joint investigation conducted by the FBI, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia, and the Department of Justice’s Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section. Operation Digital Gridlock, first announced on August 25, 2004, targeted illegal file-sharing of copyrighted materials over Direct Connect peer-to-peer networks that belonged to an online group of hubs known as The Underground Network. These networks required their users to share large quantities of computer files with other network users, all of whom could download each others’ shared files. Tanner’s conviction follows the convictions of Michael Chicoine and William Trowbridge on January 18, 2005 and Nicholas Boel on April 12, 2005 on the same charges. These pleas constituted the first federal felony convictions for copyright piracy using peer-to-peer networks, all within about nine months of the original searches and seizures.

From on or about August 2003 through August 2004, Tanner owned, maintained, operated, and moderated a Direct Connect hub named “Silent Echoes.” According to court documents, the defendant’s hub offered movies, computer software, computer games, and music in digital format. During the investigation, government agents downloaded numerous copyrighted works worth approximately \$7,371 from Tanner’s hub. Agents estimated that on any one day, Tanner’s hub shared an average of 6.72 terabytes of files, which is roughly equivalent in storage space to well over 6,000 movies in digital format.

The maximum penalties for a first-time offender convicted of conspiracy to commit felony criminal copyright infringement in violation of Title 17, United States Code, section 506, and Title 18, United States Code, sections 371 and 2319, are five years in prison, a fine of \$250,000, and restitution to the victims. Tanner will be sentenced on September 14, 2005.

These cases are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys John Carlin and Sherri Schornstein and by Department of Justice trial attorney Scott L. Garland of the Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section.

###

05-297